

WORDS ON THE WALL IN THE HALL

Words on the Wall addresses neck stiffness and some aspects of gait (walking with head turns). It builds on concepts learned in Look and See Flexibility, adding walking, dual tasks, and more head turns. Turning the head without turning the body takes awareness and flexibility.

Benefits »

- Enhances neck flexibility.
- Builds awareness for safety during head turns.
- Practices staying on path when turning the head.

Set It Up »

First, you'll need some words to put on the wall. They could be words from a familiar nursery rhyme or oddly spelled common words such as *NV* for *envy* or *t42* for *tea for two*. I've used favorite funny license plates, Dr. Seuss poems, and "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat." Print the words or short verses on one page using very large letters, such as 72-point font. Add pictures from clip art and use bright, fun colors for a nicer presentation and better comprehension.

Before class, tape these pages to the walls of the room, spreading them out and taping them up in order. For example, if you were using "The Owl and the Pussy-Cat," you would place the first sheet on the right side of the hall ("The Owl and the Pussy-Cat"). The next page goes on the left side of the hall ("went to sea"). The next page goes on the right again ("in a beautiful pea green boat") and so on, until you have created six to eight head turns. Then consider if you want to put one or two verses on the ceiling, or maybe hang them from the ceiling on a ribbon if ceilings seem too high for participants to look up at safely. Looking up while walking presents a greater balance challenge. The point is to get a variety of head turns.

How to Do It »

The Start

Begin with a flexibility session. Include shoulder rolls, head turns and tilts, chin dips, and chest and neck stretches. Add a little show and tell. Discuss how stiff necks can create problems getting around by causing the whole upper body to turn when the head turns. If they do this whole-body turning while walking, they may veer off course or stumble. A ripple effect may be extrapolated to driving. Show participants your version of whole-body turning in a humorous way.

The Moves

Use the following cues.

- Do head turns while sitting. Get them turning just their heads instead of their heads and trunk.
- Practice head turns standing in front of the chair or with a walker. (Ask participants if anyone is dizzy. If all clear, go on to walking.)
- Practice walking along a handrail with head turns. If no handrails are available, then consider holding participants' hands or walking beside them.
- Do head turns every third or fourth step at most to start. (For the frailer, do less.)

Now you're ready to take them out in your prepared hallway for Words on the Wall in Hall.

- Start walking.
- Turn only the head to the right. Be like an owl.
- Read the words out loud. Look forward again and keep walking.
- Turn only the head left.
- Read the words out loud. Look forward again and keep walking.
- Keep a straight path and pay attention to balance and the path.
- Continue looking right and left until the entire nursery rhyme has been read.
- At the end, turn and walk back, reading the poem from the last lines to the first. (Participants are still walking forward, not backward. Going back through the poem, participants will be less able to predict the next line and will have to pay more attention to the printed material they are reading. Distraction is good for balance training, too.)



Keep It Safe »

The head turns in this activity may cause dizziness; talk about the possibility in advance. Participants should stop if they become dizzy. The dizziness may stop if they slow the head turns way down. If that works and they are comfortable, invite them to continue.

Be especially cautious about looking up. Watch them more closely and remind them to be careful. This is a good activity for taking turns. Walk beside the participant, and hold their hand the first time through, especially if you are having them look up to the ceiling. Stretching the chest, shoulders, and neck first will help.

Live It »

Stiff necks can cause problems with posture, balance, and function. Keeping the neck and shoulders flexible will help maintain mobility. Participants should be aware of their surroundings and stay on track when turning the head.